

Q: Good afternoon. Today is August 29th, 2019. My name is Kathleen Hennrikus, and I'm here at the Newton Free Library with Jennifer Price. Together we are participating in the Newton Talks Oral History Project that is being conducted with the Newton Free Library, Historic Newton, and the Newton Senior Center.

So I'd like to start with just a little background.

A: Yeah.

Q: Like, where were you born, and how did this all come about?

A: So, I was born in Summit, New Jersey. So I'm a Jersey girl. I always joke, you can take the girl out of Jersey, but you can't the Jersey out of the girl, so I'm still a Jersey girl.

Q: Lot of people ask you what exit?

A: Yes. 142. So...that's the Turnpike.

Q: Alright.

A: If you wanted the Garden State Parkway I'd have to give you another number. So, born and raised in New Jersey, although I did spend two and a half years of my life in Wimbledon, England, as a kindergartner, first, and second grader. My dad got transferred over there, so I

went. I learned my love of tennis there. My fondest memory of Wimbledon was when I was a little kid, opening the door and hearing the crowd clapping live while I was watching Jimmy Connors and John McEnroe on television.

Q: That's so great.

A: It's pretty cool.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: --And went to a small private school in Morristown, New Jersey called the Peck School, and then did high school at Madison High School, our public high school, where...After that I went to Princeton.

Q: Still Jersey.

A: Still Jersey. And then I fell in love with a woman who got a job in Massachusetts, specifically working at Wellesley College. So six months into our dating relationship she decided to move to Wellesley, and so did I.

Q: Wow.

A: So that's how I'm here.

Q: Great.

A: We're now 22 years into marriage with two kids, three dogs, and a white picket fence.

Q: Congratulations. And is she still at Wellesley?

A: Nope. She is a professor at Boston College, and is helping--is the primary caregiver in our home. The fun story about that is each one of us had one of the kids. So she had our first, Charlie, and I had our second, Elsie. And after I was home with Elsie for a year, she said, "You know what, you like working more than I do, and I like being home more than you do, so go get a job." And that was when I applied to be the principal at either Newton North or Newton South.

Q: Were they both open at the same time?

A: They were both open at the same time. So that was a very interesting story--a Newton story. So, Brenda Keegan was the interim over at Newton South, and Jennifer Huntington was retiring, and so they did a joint search between Newton North and Newton South. And it was very interesting. So I applied for them. I will tell you in the typical female situation, I wasn't gonna apply, because I had never been a principal before, and I felt of course because I hadn't been, I would not be qualified for the position. I think so often women, if they can't check every box, they don't apply for a job. There's some research out there about that. But my wife said to me, she's like, "Look. Just apply, because if somebody gets the job that is as qualified as you are, you're gonna be so mad at yourself that you didn't apply."

So I interviewed for Newton North one night, and then the next morning I came back with a totally different panel and interviewed for Newton South the next day, which was just the weirdest thing--to be interviewing and trying to say, "I'm really interested in both of you," right. And then I was named a finalist for both of the schools. At the same time I was a finalist for the Weston High School position. So within a week, I was interviewing at Weston High School, Newton North, and Newton South.

My favorite story about that interview process was actually at Weston High School. So one of the things that I had been very forthright was about my family structure. You know, I said--and I had said to the Weston superintendent at the time, a wonderful man, I said, you know, "Just so you know, if you hire me, you need to know I'm openly gay. I have two kids and I'm never gonna hide that, because I don't want my children to feel any shame about their family." And so--and he's like, "No problem!" I'm like, "Great." So I'm sitting--it was my last day, I had interviewed at Newton North, I had interviewed at Newton South, and I had interviewed at Weston, and it was like five o'clock on a Thursday, and I had done these three interviews in one week. And I'm sitting there, and here's the image: I'm in a theater of some sort, and there's an 80-year-old woman who is a Weston resident and she's got her purse on her lap, so you're thinking the bag on the lap, right. And she says--everyone asked me, because at the time I had a very young child. I had a daughter who was about to turn one. And she said--she asked a question that of course was illegal to ask. She said, "Well, you know, how are you going to take care of your kids and be the principal of Weston High School?" Everyone asked that, all in Newton, all in Weston, and I had a response that I had rehearsed all week: "I am not the primary caregiver in my relationship. My partner will be home with the kids so that I can focus on my work." That had--no one had asked

any questions after that. And she looked at me with this packed auditorium as I'm interviewing and she said, "Is your partner a man or a woman?" And I looked at her and I just was like, "It's Friday--it's Thursday, I've been doing this for four straight days, what the heck." And I said, "A woman." And she goes, "Good for you."

Q: Oh! There you are!

A: And it was just this wonderful moment of like, "Thank goodness I'm in Massachusetts." Right? And that--

Q: Never assume.

A: --and it was--also really made me happy, that I was pleased that I had told the superintendent, because I feel like--you know, and I said really honestly, I'm like, "Look. You know, I am who I am, and I don't want you to feel like--you know, if I'm not the right fit, just don't hire me. It's better for both of us." So that was my story. Ultimately, I was--Jeff Young was the superintendent of schools at the time, and he called me up--I still remember this conversation--he called me up, he goes, "Do you know anything about buildings?" And I said, "Well, I just renovated my kitchen." And he said, "Well, so that means you can read an architecture plan?" I said, "Yeah." He goes, "Okay," and then I became the principal of Newton North. So, there we go, where I learned a lot about buildings.

The other interesting story about the Newton North/Newton South reality was at the same time, the principal of Newton South was a man by the name of Brian Salzer. And we both identified as LGBT, and it was a really interesting moment, and you can find this in archives. So, the Boston Globe called me up and said, "We want to talk to you about becoming the principal" and all this other stuff. And they said, "Well, what's your family structure?" And I said, "Well, I have two kids, let's just leave it at that." Because I--y'know, let me be the principal, before, you know, I lead with kind of my home structure and my home life. And they said, "Well, you know, the principal of Newton South, the new principal, Brian, has admitted that he's openly gay."

Q: Admitted.

A: Or "said" or "shared" or whatever language. And then I was like, "Oh my god, like I don't want to like, sell out my new colleague and not be with him on that." And I said, "Well, so am I." And if you look, you'll--I still remember the headline like it was yesterday. In the Boston Globe it said "Gay principals to take helm of Newton Public Schools." And there was a whole article about who we were, but leading with our sexual orientation. And it was a little hard, not nearly as hard as some of the other articles, but it was hard to be seen as the gay principal rather than as the competent principal or the whatever. But that was a big deal, that Newton North and Newton South hired two openly gay leaders at the same time.

Q: Did--I'm interested in sort of, were the questions different, do you think, between Newton North and Newton South, depending on the students who went to either school? Do you remember that?

A: So, the questions by the students?

Q: No, the interviewing committee.

A: Yeah. It was interesting. You know, there--I love both schools. They do definitely have different cultures, the two schools. And so, you know, Newton North always has had a higher percentage of kids in special education, so there was a lot around how are you going to differentiate and support the needs of a diverse learner. The reality is also Newton South has those same challenges. You know, both of them shared a question on--you had to do a written response on the achievement gap. Both were committed to those. I would say that the questions weren't that different, but the tours--I spent a day touring each school, and there's just a different vibe. You know, I think--and I'm a Newton resident as you know--I think that within Newton, we make the differences much larger than they actually are, if you compare Newton to other communities, right? But we do like to say, you know, Newton North and Newton South are very different spaces, but I--having been around to a lot of schools, I think there's a lot of similarities. There are lots of teachers who care about lots of different types of kids.

Q: Architecturally, I think they're very different.

A: Very different.

Q: More than--Newton South definitely has this California--to me--vibe, with low-slung buildings and walking outside to--

A: And you remember, when I took over Newton North, it looked like a prison.

Q: I do remember.

A: So, you know, it no longer does that, but the building I inherited--I spent a lot of time in my first few years as principal dealing with burning up univents and leaks and things falling apart.

Q: So when did they decide that the architectural drawings are going to become a reality in your tenure?

A: Yeah, so there was a vote probably about a year into my tenure, where the citizens of Newton voted to support the high school. And I distinctly remember, we had just had NEASC come through, which is the accrediting organization for public high schools. And we were in jeopardy of being put on warning because of our buildings. And I distinctly remember that the report was gonna come out, and this was before kind of NEASC was willing to email all sorts of things. They had a written report. And I wanted that report in my hands prior to the vote and prior to the Tab deadline of the vote. And so I drove down to Connecticut to get it from the chair to get it back here in time, so that the Tab would be able to have access to the report, so that the voters of the city knew prior to the vote that we were in jeopardy of being not accredited because of the physical structure. You know, I don't know if that mattered, but I felt like it was important that people knew the severity of the structure. And it was really hard. I felt so bad for Newton, because for Newton residents who know Newton, that building *was* the new building.

Q: Right. Exactly.

A: We used to have the old three buildings and the tunnels that connected them, and in the 1970s we were so excited to go into this new building. And it was only 40 years later that we were saying, "This building isn't working." And I felt like, "Yeah...I'm really sorry." You know? And--it's not working. You know, what I said to my staff and what I would say publicly at that time is, "Wouldn't it be great to have a building that echoes or resembles the excellence that's happening within our classrooms? Because all the work we're doing is sort of in spite of this building rather than because of the building." My official line though was--because you can imagine being the principal of that very controversial project--was, you know, I said, "I'm just the principal. I'm gonna do the best I can to support kids to learn and teachers to teach in whatever building the city chooses to put me in."

But you know...and just supporting, watching David Cohen go through all of that. I mean, his kind of mayoral career really kind of came down to the cost of Newton North. And one of my proudest moments was after all this was done and we were in the new building, is I gave Mayor Cohen the principal's plaque from Newton North. And it was just a small gesture to say, "This building's here because of you, Mayor Cohen." He really championed that building at, frankly, his own expense.

Q: It's interesting that that can be said of so many things--this library has...lots of people think of it as brand-new, and working here has the same issues: the heating and cooling system is iffy, they designed it with an atrium for three stories, which, if you think about books, they're very

heavy, it would be nice to spread them out. And now it's going on with the Senior Center, the Newton Senior Center, or generational...whatever they're gonna end up. Not only where it's gonna go, the physical location of wherever they decide it's gonna go, but again, the cost will be an issue, and the...it's an evergreen issue.

A: It's always an issue. And it's always an issue for a city, and you know every time you build a new building, you know...the famous term of "value engineering," where you're taking things out in order to get the price tag down. And I know no one will believe it, but I can tell you first-hand there was a lot of value engineering in the Newton North building. And you know, as you think about it amortized over the year, the life-span of that building, it would be better to invest all in at the beginning, if you're really gonna have a building that will stay.

Q: But it's a difficult proposition to sell.

A: Absolutely. Absolutely. And I'm a taxpayer. After Newton North, I became a superintendent. I'm intimately aware of budgets and city budgets and town budgets in that case. But it's really interesting to have gone through it. And you know, I think that as we've seen with the elementary schools that have been renovated in Newton recently, I think there is a real commitment to providing appropriate physical spaces for our kids to learn and our teachers to teach. And that really came out of some impressive work by I think the Warren administration, and also probably an unrecognized contributor--the real person behind that was Sandy Guryan, who used to be the CFO of the Newton Public Schools. I know it was her brilliance working with one of Setti's CFO--talking about how we could over time create a structure where we could do an elementary

school at a time, and not rely on Massachusetts School Building Authority dollars. And her legacy is continuing to be seen throughout Newton each and every year.

Q: It is. I pass the Carr School every day, and the first couple of years--a couple years ago it had a big sign on it that said "Cabot at Carr." And here we are, August, the school year is about to begin, and the "Cabot at Carr" has gone away, and there is a new--I can't remember, maybe Burr, I can't remember.

A: Well it started as Angier at Burr--at Carr, and then it was Zervas, and now it was Cabot, and now it's whatever's next.

Q: Yeah.

A: So I mean, it's--and that really was Sandy's vision. I still remember when she had the vision to take back Carr, which as you know was part of--was not part of the school system at that time, and to make it a swing space. Because not only do you have to think about the cost of constructing a new building, it's also where do you put the kids? It's one of the major reasons the decision of the voters was not to renovate Newton North. A) The HVAC system was a disaster, but B) What do you do with 2,000 kids while you're renovating a building? And we've watched other communities try to renovate, and the sunk costs associated with that, whether they be portable classrooms or whether they be just creating safe space for kids, really you'd rather put those dollars to a new building.

Q: And geographically, Newton is quite large. The library is not in the middle of Newton, and kids from Oak Hill are closer to West Roxbury than they are here, just by virtue of geography. So it's interesting to think of all the elementary schools in Newton trying to figure out how it's gonna--what the domino effect is gonna be and how it's gonna fall.

A: And you know, it's always so hard, because the beauty and the wonder of public education is that we have the privilege to educate every kid within the appropriate zip code, or the appropriate city. Yet, that can fluctuate so much. I mean, I watched that as principal of Newton North or anywhere I worked, you know and we had--just use an example of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. In the middle of the year a bunch of kids showed up here to go to school. And you're educating them. Now that doesn't mean you have extra teachers. It doesn't mean you have extra desks. So you just never know how many kids--I mean, there's lots of census work, but it's a guessing game at best to try to figure out 10 years from now how many five-year-olds there are gonna be.

Q: Right. And again, geography-wise, Louisiana is not next door.

A: Right! Same thing happened with the hurricane in Puerto Rico. I mean, it's...you just never know what's gonna happen, and you have to be ready for--to support any kid who comes anytime during the year.

Q: Well I suppose education is based on flexibility in a lot of sense of whoever is your classroom at any given time, you have to be flexible enough to be able to take care of all of that, no matter what it looks like.

A: Especially public education, but yes.

Q: So you--what were years of tenure at Newton North?

A: So I was there from 2006 to 2015, so I did a nine years tenure at Newton North as the principal.

Q: And then you went to North Reading.

A: North Andover--

Q: North Andover, sorry.

A: --where I was the superintendent of schools for three very short years. I feel--that was a tough...I really enjoyed my time in North Andover, a wonderful community that really embraced me and embraced some kind of significant changes there in a very positive way. And then I left because I got recruited by Buckingham Browne and Nichols, which is an independent school in Cambridge. And I didn't even--we joke I still have not applied for the job. And when they first came to me I said, "Are you kidding me?" The only reason I called them back is they said, "Do

you know anyone who might be interested?" and I had a friend who was looking for a job. And they said, "Would you be interested?" And I said, "No way! I'm a public school person!" And then I came to realize how special and diverse and inclusive that school is, and it might be a really interesting fit for me at this time. So that's where I am now.

Q: Maybe it's karma from the three interviews that you did in Newton and Weston. That you just--

A: Right. Well I didn't mean I didn't interview a lot, I just never applied.

Q: --yes, no, you did, right. That they were--knew, they knew. Because you have a connection with BB&N now, right--one of your children...?

A: Yeah, and that's only because I'm the head of school. So...

Q: And your other child is...?

A: Graduating from Newton North this year.

Q: Congratulations.

A: Yeah, we're really excited. He's Class of 2020, and you know, I feel just wonderful about having my kid at Newton North, and I feel wonderful about having my kid at BB&N. I think one

of the things that I have seen is that for each kid there are different decisions you make based on who they are, and I think we're so lucky to have schools like Newton North in Newton. All of our public schools--both of my kids went to Pierce, both kids went to Day, and we've got one at Newton North now. So I've really enjoyed watching my kids go through what I think are fantastic schools.

Q: It's so interesting you said that, because we were having a Newton Talks meeting and the woman I think from Historic Newton was saying people in Newton still say their elementary school, their middle school, and their high school. Those three things are linked.

A: Yes.

Q: They keep them very close. And given the idea of the village, they...people like to think of themselves as from very specific places. When people are applying for library cards, sometimes when you ask their address they'll say Waban, and people who aren't from here will type it as if it were a different city. Because that's what they want to say first. Instead of Newton--

A: We all have--I live in West Newton, and yeah, we all joke, we got the Flats and the Hill, and I joke that I'm on the incline.

Q: Just up a little bit. So it must have been a difficult time for both you and the Newton South principal at the same time having your sexuality out there as if it were the lead defining

characteristic. And how did the parents at Newton, or the students more importantly I would guess, because you see them every day and the parents are maybe--you know, maybe drop in.

A: Yeah, you know, I think there were easy parts of it. I have always been a person who's authentically me, and so I think actually people appreciate that. And I think for many students, whether or not I wanted to admit it, I think my arrival created a lot of safe space for a lot of kids. Right? And knowing that the head of school, sorry the principal of the school, was openly gay created a lot of space for kids who were questioning or somewhere on the LGBTQA--I always say alphabet soup at the end--spectrum. And so I think that that was very positive. The kids didn't really care. I mean, at that time, they were like, "...and?"

You know, some parents were a little bit more challenging. So at that time we still had Brian Camenker, who was a pretty challenging--against anyone who was gay or identified as LGBTQ. And he and I had some interesting conversations. He was a Newton North parent at the time, and he had led a pretty significant effort against any kind of GSA's or anything like that. But really the parents--I was a member of the community, my kids were in school with some of their kids, they knew my wife. It was hard to kind of get upset with us.

And I was very clear. You know I still remember, and I won't use what principal it was, but there was a principal at the time in Newton who had signed the anti-marriage petition. And that principal's community had found out that that principal had signed the anti-marriage petition. And I remember saying--there was a gay parents network that had--I forget the name of it--here in Newton, and I was part of it. And so we were at some event with kind of the gay families of

Newton and people were really mad at this principal. And I said, "Listen to me. Has this principal treated you and your kid okay?" And they said, "Absolutely." And I said, "So you want conservative families to give me a chance as long as I treat them and their families okay, and now you're flipping the script. And as long as you feel supported, we all get to have our own lives as principals. And as long as we create safe space for all kids, then we're doing our job." And that's what I would say to families who wouldn't necessarily agree with what they would call my "lifestyle choice." We can talk about that word "choice," but--

Q: We can talk about that word "lifestyle."

A: Yeah. Right. Exactly. Both of those words. But that's the language they would use with me. But you know, if I treated them well and I made a safe space for them and their kids, and allowed them to be successful within the schools, they gave me the space that I needed to do my work. The bigger issue was not the people who interacted with me even on a--whose kids went to my school or the kids. You know, the bigger issue were people who objectified me as something and didn't know me. And so specifically, Tom Mountain was impossible. He wrote a really, really scathing, horrible piece in the Newton Tab about me, where he--

Q: And he had never met you?

A: He had never met me, never talked to me. And he called me Jenny, which was really demeaning, and said that I was not academically qualified to be the principal of Newton North. And he said a whole bunch of horrible other things about me. Really picked on me. I wondered

how gendered that was, given that there were two of us. But really horrible piece, and it was homophobic at best, and I never ever forgave the Newton Tab for allowing him to publish it, frankly. It was--and I think a lot of what Tom published, they shouldn't have allowed him to publish. But that one in particular. And you know he went after me. I still remember that comment about me not being academically qualified. And my wife was like, "Wait a minute. You went to Princeton, you got a master's from Boston College and you're getting a doctorate from Harvard. What is he asking for?" So I just remember laughing a lot about that one. I will tell you Tom apologized to me eventually.

Q: He did?

A: Yeah. He and I worked together on the 9/11 memorial. So my mom and stepdad were killed in 9/11.

Q: I'm so sorry.

A: And so I worked on that memorial with Tom, which we put up in front of the fire department. And Tom and I worked on that, and after working on it, he wrote me a very wonderful piece saying, "Wow, I was so wrong." It was about 10 years too late, however, I appreciate that he stepped up and did that.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's not--

Q: He could have swept it under the rug and just assumed--

A: It's not his normal M.O.

Q: Right.

A: So I do appreciate that. And then the other really challenging components were...I got some pretty significant threats against my life from outside of Newton. Very significant threats from kind of outside organizations. So you would get targeted by some of these hate groups, and I remember in the old building coming back to my office and reading this just horrible email, and realizing that I had like 800 of them. So I had to turn them all over to my assistant and she read through them and we had to turn a number of them over to the police. So it was just hard to be like, hey, you know I wake up every day and I just want to like, do my job and I want to create a place where kids can feel safe and supported and get a great education and I want to support teachers. And you know I come back after lunch and people are talking about what they--how they want to--not that they want to kill me, but actually how they want to kill me. So those were the hard times. And you know it was very rare that it was somebody who was on the inside or knew me. It was often people assuming I had a political agenda, assuming that I didn't support all types of kids, and assuming that I wasn't competent to do this work because of my sexual orientation.

Q: Well, I think often hate speech can be characterized that way, as at a distance because then you don't have to face up to the reality of what the issue really is. And I remember talking to Bob Parlin--we interviewed him a couple months ago--who does the GSA at Newton South, and he was saying when he first broached that idea, a lot of parents in Newton South were saying, "Nah, I don't think there are any gay kids here at Newton South."

A: Right.

Q: Bob Parlin going, "Uh, I don't think that's right." And think, in that fairly short amount of time, Massachusetts was the first state for gay marriage.

A: I know.

Q: Lots of people didn't think in our lifetime that that change would have happened.

A: I never thought that would happen.

Q: And I think...and now, I mean, we were the outliers, and now it's accepted everywhere. And I remember people who were looking for it in Maine were saying if they knocked on your door and said, "This is what I think gay marriage is gonna mean to me," and made a personal connection, the person was much more likely to understand what was going on than, "Oh, it's a boogey-person out there, and we don't know what that is, so we're afraid and we don't want to work on that."

A: It was so interesting for us as a family, because we had our first child prior to gay marriage, and we had our second child after gay marriage. And even just the issues around that. So our first kid was born in 2001, Charlie, and when he was born, he had no healthcare because I was working in the Lincoln-Sudbury Public Schools and at that time, although they wanted to, there was no way--because my wife had Charlie--that I was seen as having any relationships to Charlie. So we had to get Charlie healthcare as a newborn. And we had to call up Tufts or whoever was my healthcare provider and they said, "Excuse me? What's the birth date?" And they said, "Why?" And I said, "Because I'm the primary health provider. There's no relation to this kid." I couldn't have my wife on my health plan, so she had to have her own health plan. But given that she was just calling up to get a health plan, it was cheaper to just put Charlie on by himself. And you know when the birth certificate came it just had my wife's name on it, and then we had to go through a three to four thousand dollar process to get a co-parent adoption for Charlie. And then once Charlie was adopted by me, he could go on my health plan, but I had a family plan for Charlie and myself, but we still had to have a separate plan for my wife.

When we had Elsie, because of gay marriage, as soon as Elsie was born, both Katya and I were put on Elsie's birth certificate, and Elsie had no problem getting healthcare, and we were all in a family plan. And that may seem like a small issue, but that's thousands and thousands of dollars. When gay marriage was passed, we were one of the couples who actually went back and re-filed our federal taxes. Because for many years--sorry, once DOMA was shot down. Once DOMA...

Q: Defense of Marriage Act.

A: Once Defense of Marriage Act was shot down by the Supreme Court, we went back and re-filed our taxes, because for a period of years, we filed jointly in Massachusetts and then had to file a dummy federal and had to file individually federally. So we went back and re-filed our taxes. And it probably cost us almost as much to re-file those taxes as the refund we got, but we didn't care. So that people understood that denying us the privilege to marry actually had a significant financial impact on us. Those are just two examples. But we lived through that. I mean, I joke that we had three marriages and no divorces, and I keep saying the religious right should be happier with us. But you know so we got married, nothing legal, 20-some years ago in 1997, and then we went up to Vermont and did a civil union when that was legal.

Q: Because they were before--yeah.

A: And then when we could we were married in Massachusetts. So I always thought I should just get a frame of you know the various weddings that I've had and just leave empty spaces, because I thought somebody would overturn it at some point. I still remember I was down in Newtonville picking up somebody, and I was driving past Harvest Bakery when I heard that DOMA was shot down by the Supreme Court, and I pulled over and I just remember weeping. Just thinking about the impact that that was gonna have on my family and my kids and my grandkids. It was a big moment.

Q: It's a huge moment I think. And I think that's what people don't understand about hate, is their first image, their first impulse is always, "Change is bad." And then change, even

incrementally--first DOMA, then civil unions, now marriage is throughout the United States, in towns I think that never thought, even if Massachusetts was the bluest of blue states--it's legal in Alabama, it's legal in Texas. It's a huge difference. And it's just to enshrine it in legality is more important I think than maybe almost anything else we can do.

A: I had an opportunity a year and a half ago to talk with Margaret Marshall, who was the chief justice of the Supreme Court who passed marriage--

Q: Wrote a fabulous decision.

A: --yeah, and did an amazing job. And she says that in her life--she's now retired from the court--she said in her life everyone--what she's talked about the most is that families like mine come up and just say, "You changed my life." And she--two things--I heard her have a speech but then I got to talk to her personally, and you know she grew up in South Africa, and talked a lot about how she just saw this as apartheid. And that this was, "Wow, how are we treating a whole sub-population of people differently?" So for her, this never was an issue. When this was argued in front of her, this was very black and white to her.

Q: So to speak.

A: So to speak, exactly. And then the other thing is, so she now works at a law firm in Boston, and she says it's so funny, because if you remember back, her life was threatened, it was a really difficult decision. Those liberal Massachusetts--

Q: Not for her, but for...

A: Yeah, but she took some pain too, right, you know? And she says now that she has all these law clerks that come in, and they say, "So, when you passed marriage in Massachusetts, like, was it a big deal?" And she's like, "They have no idea that like, it was a big deal."

Q: And even in that short amount of time.

A: Exactly. For these new law clerks it's like, "Of course!" And she's like, "I have to explain to them that like, it was a really big deal." And it was just funny to hear her say that. And she's an amazing woman who did an amazing thing I think for this country.

Q: I agree. She--I remember talking about--someone asked her if her husband, Tony Lewis at the New York Times, had written the decision because it was so well written, and she was so appalled.

A: She should have been!

Q: That's right. "No, I wrote every word of that myself."

A: She's an amazing woman.

Q: It's a great concept that it was so clear to so many people. And I think often when you take a step back, you think, "This has been so wrong for so long that people just keep thinking that this is the way it has to be." And then someone comes from the outside and says, "That's not really the way it has to be, and look at it--this!" And we did it. It was a huge decision.

A: It meant a big deal for lots of us.

Q: That's right. And I think it's important to keep that historical--short historical--record out there in front of people to remind them that change is possible.

A: You know and I think all of us who lived through that just keep hoping and praying we don't go backwards. I think some of the things you currently hear coming out of the administration just--you kind of are on edge, no matter how secure we feel in what we all affectionately call "the Newton bubble." You just have to keep fighting for kind of equality for all.

Q: That's right. I think that whether it's LGBTQ rights or EPA admissions being rolled back or--

A: Immigrant rights.

Q: Right. Denying healthcare to people who you don't think deserve healthcare--it's a good memory to think, "We did it, so we can do it again. We can keep doing it."

A: Correct.

Q: So, is there anything else you want to talk about in being a Newton person?

A: You know I think that the reason I am a Newton person is that when we had kids, Katya and I decided that this is the place where we wanted our kids to go to school. And this was way before I became principal of Newton North. But this has always been an inclusive, supportive community, and I'm so proud to be a Newton resident. And you know I often said I wanted my kids to just be able to be kids, and to grow up in a place where they don't have to be little activists and they just can be who they are. And that has really been a gift to me and my family, that my kids have been able to grow up, and at this point the fact that they have two moms is sort of boring, right? It's like, "Okay, what else? How boring." But to envision that when we first had children--I mean, I currently have a kid who just turned 18 a few days ago, and that was at the beginning of lots of same-sex families having kids. And you know he has navigated himself through the Newton Public Schools and living in Newton in a way that he has felt so comfortable and supported. And I think--and one of the reasons I loved running the Newton Public Schools was that was the ethos we had within the schools when I was at Newton North, right? When I was running Newton North, working in the schools. So I think this is a very special community that has a long history of creating a really wonderful place where anyone can raise a family--and I think that that's a value that is so important to this community--and a place that no matter who you are, you can be yourself and you can feel respected and supported, and I think that that's just such a great part of living in Newton.

Q: I think it probably is something that bears repeating as well, because I think after you've been in it for a while, you sort of forget that and take it for granted, as everyone does where they live,

how they've navigated their lives and how important it is. And how new kids coming in to Newton North or Newton South have different issues now--the whole immigrant question, and how you make life safe. I live in Watertown and I think the last time I heard, there were 26 languages at the high school.

A: Yeah. Absolutely.

Q: And that is a huge difference from 15 years ago, that kids come from all over and you need to make room for everybody.

A: Yeah. And you know this community has always done that.

Q: That's right.

A: And I think it's just a real testament to those of us who choose to live here, and to be a space where we open our doors. And you know although it may seem strange now, I mean Newton took a huge risk to hire Brian and I as principals. And Jeff Young and the community embraced that. I mean at that time, there were very few places where I could work, even with all of my qualifications and hopefully abilities. And you know even now, I was in a conference this fall with a bunch of schools nationally, and one of the people who was there was like, "You know, you could never work at my school," from a different state, a southern state. And I looked at them and said, "What makes you think I'd want to?" You know? So the reality of the situation is even now I think I would have a hard time in some parts of our country and definitely in our

world getting a job, and I just appreciate that Newton gave me that chance. And you know I do remember really early on in my career somebody wrote me an email, it might have been in my first few weeks, and said, "You know Jen, if you can do this, like you will break some barriers for principals who are openly gay." And on the one hand I said, "Oh, that's wonderful," on the other hand I felt a lot of pressure.

Q: Right. I think the term "role model" can bring with it--

A: A lot of stress. And it was hard, because I made it and Brian didn't. I mean, Brian was here under three years, and he was an experienced principal, and Newton South moved on from him. And Newton North luckily did not move on from me.

Q: Well, I think it's also probably hard to say--this gets mixed up with a whole bunch of other stuff, and how much of this is the pressure to do something that maybe not is the right thing to do, but maybe we can move past this. And we should say, we're holding this interview the day after Newton teachers held a rally at City Hall across the street for a new contract. So I think--and the two sides are pretty far apart in what they're arguing about, and the school year is about to start. So that cycle--I think we may be able to pat ourselves on the back for some things, but there's obviously still a lot of work that we could do around supporting the teachers in the community, thereby supporting the students in the community. And that's still out there and waiting to be done.

A: And it always will be.

Q: And it always will be. So, I just wanted to say thank you very much for coming in and talking to us today. And this archive will be forever in the Newton City Library archives and a hundred years from now somebody will listen to this and think, "Oh, it was a big deal?"

A: It was a big deal.

Q: And it was a big deal.

A: You know, god willing they'll still think, "Wow, it was a big deal," right? In a wonderful way, I feel so blessed to have grown up when I grew up. And you know fifty years earlier, I would have had a very different life.

Q: That's right. Thank you very much, Jennifer Price.

A: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW